

Written Testimony of Representative Derek Kilmer (WA-06)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 2: Making Government Work Better

When I'm home I spend a lot of my time going out and listening to the folks I represent. Everywhere I go – whether it's a small business on the Olympic Peninsula, a VFW in Bremerton, or a block party in Tacoma – I hear a common refrain from the people I sit down with.

They want this economy to stay on track and they want Congress to get back on track too. As Democrats, our focus is on making sure the middle class succeeds. And we want to make it easier for everyone to join the middle class.

The American idea of rags-to-riches is great. We need to support the idea that everyone can be the next Bill Gates. But we should also be the party that supports folks looking to purchase their first home, or starting a new small business, or getting the family's first college degree.

To help with that we also believe in the power of government to bring about this shared prosperity. But we know that power can only be harnessed when our government is working effectively.

So at the beginning of this year the New Democrat Coalition released the American Prosperity Agenda – a blueprint to show that our party is for a vibrant economy in which every American has an opportunity to succeed.

A key part of this agenda is improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our government. Because right now, many people are feeling left out. They see agencies and programs that are not listening to their needs.

It's time we flip that around.

We can start by empowering the government to make smarter spending decisions, and giving businesses more certainty when it's time to fill government equipment orders. For example, I've been a part of a big push to reform the Pentagon's acquisition process.

My experiences with small businesses helped me to understand the need to address this system that impacts both the capabilities of our military and the strength of our economy. Business as usual has cost U.S. taxpayers, continued programs that stop at dead ends, and overburdened workers while befuddling Washington state entrepreneurs.

So I'm committed to working to make a system that's more effective, responsible, and worthy of the men and women who serve our country. I've always believed that government works best when folks are transparent and accountable to the people they represent.

It's my belief that our government agencies should take the same approach. That's why our Agenda included a call on the General Services Administration to work with Yelp to create unique Yelp pages for each agency or department within our government.

And now the GSA and Yelp have agreed to join forces so people that use services can share their feedback on the experience.

These days our world moves fast. It wasn't that long ago that Yelp was just an idea, not an app that you can find on phones the world over. We need to bring our government out of the 20th and into the 21st century.

It's time to utilize new technologies like data analytics to root out waste, fraud, and abuse and deliver better services to constituents. It's something I'll be pushing for in the coming months so our government can start being more proactive than reactive.

One last piece of the puzzle to unleashing middle class prosperity is enacting concrete reforms that will make Congress a place where legislating happens once again. Right now, Americans look at Washington D.C. and see finger pointing and gridlock. It's time to bring our campaign finance system into balance and make needed reforms so voters pick their representatives.

Not the other way around. It's why I've introduced a bill to make modest but meaningful reforms to the Federal Election Commission so it can get back to weeding out campaign finance abuses.

By making the commission functional once again we can make sure it helps us revitalize our democracy and focus on citizens rather than special interests. While we have some work to do, it's important that we keep pushing to give people a government that actually represents them and is focused on making positive changes.

It's a key part of the effort that brought us all here today. Without it, it will be that much harder to unleash the quality job creation and economic growth that will keep America a step ahead of its competitors.